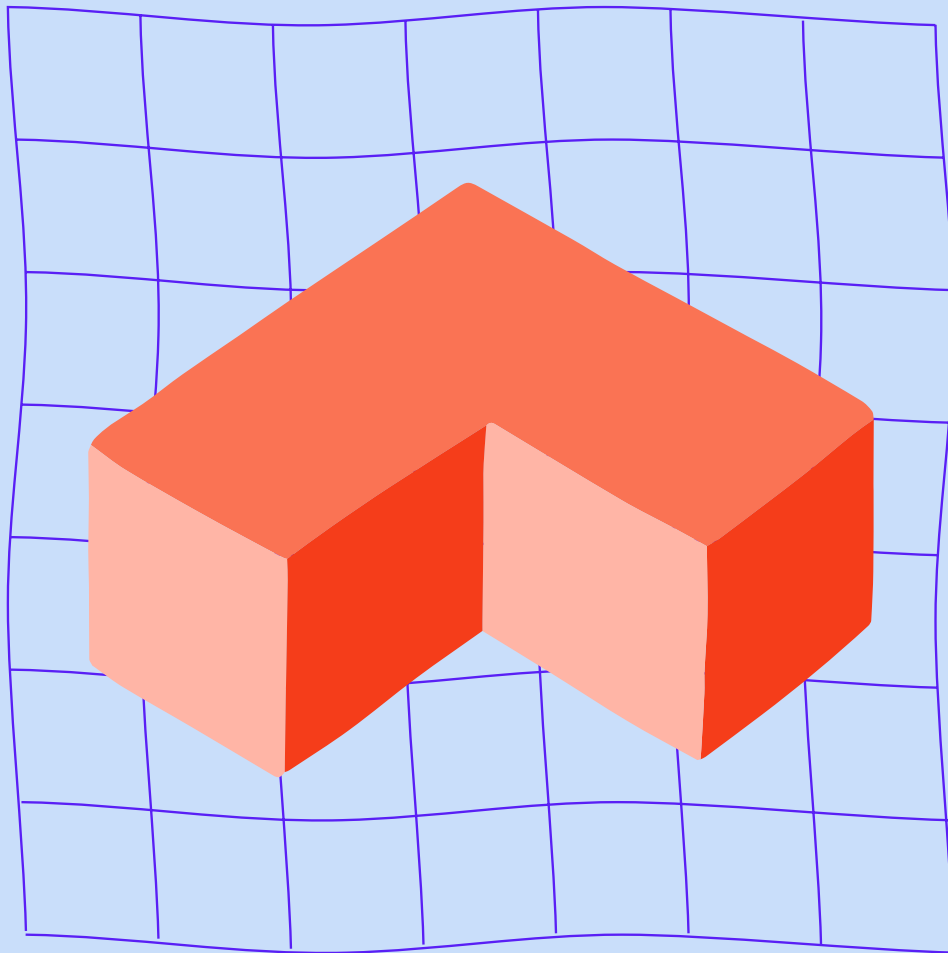


Elevate shared concerns



This signal is part of Civic Signals, a larger framework to help create better digital public spaces. We believe it's a platform's responsibility to design the conditions that promote ideal digital public spaces. Such spaces should be designed to help people feel Welcome, to Connect, to Understand and to Act. These four categories encompass the 14 Civic Signals.

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At a glance



Shared concerns are issues that are important to enough people that they should be elevated for consideration by society at large, whether by the news media, legislators, interest groups, or other actors.

Why It Matters

When an issue is brought to the attention of people who didn't previously know about it or consider it important, people may become better able to discuss the issue, and may start to consider it important. When platforms surface concerns, these issues can also get picked up by other, more traditional media outlets – amplifying the issues' ability to reach more members of the public. Finally, media coverage can in turn influence lawmakers' and regulators' own priority list.

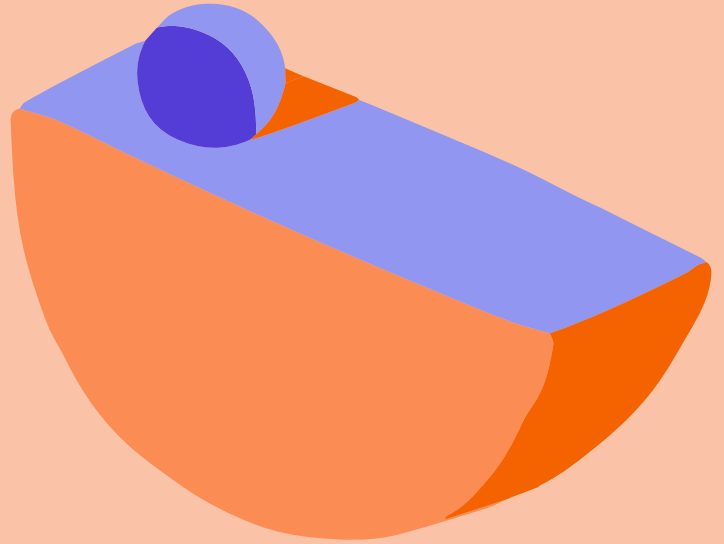


[Social media can give a] comprehensive view about a certain issue... pro and con... We can see the circumstance in a full view.” – Wali, Malaysian focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Chicago NPR affiliate WBEZ used face-to-face encounters, community group partnerships, and social media marketing to engage with groups that had responded less to its previous public engagement efforts, on the south and west sides of the city. WBEZ found that the process delivered unexpected, novel ideas. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/curious-communities-online-engagement-meets-old-school-face-to-face-outreach.php
- The engaged journalism project 100 Days in Appalachia used the conversational platform GroundSource to text-message with high school students in four states, learning about the issues important to them. https://medium.com/@jake_lynch/talking-to-the-kids-where-they-are-4a23983057d
- Platforms could intentionally diversify what they show in people's feeds, by deliberately showcasing journalism that addresses various groups' issues of concern. For Facebook that would mean expanding and more specifically defining its commitment to "diversity" in its news stories, while perhaps slightly deemphasizing personal relevance and "broad appeal," as described here: <https://www.facebook.com/news/howitworks>
- Some authors have argued that platform companies should get rid of their "trending" modules. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/02/trending-on-social-media-is-worthless.html> There may be another way. Instead of just determining the stories whose popularity is surging across the board, trending modules could look for stories that are popular among subgroups. And instead of looking for what has just popped up over the last few minutes or hours, these modules could look for what's shown staying power for weeks or even months.

Literature review



By Tamar Wilner,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Michael Chan,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

What the Signal Is

Shared concerns are issues that are important to a number of people. They may not be important to everyone – few issues are – but they are important to enough people that they should be elevated for consideration by society at large, whether by the news media, legislators, interest groups, or other actors.

To find shared concerns, we may look to issues identified as important by major societal groups, such as those defined by geography, race or ethnicity, income, gender, sexual orientation or some other parameters. Groups could be interperson-

ally connected and identified through their network connections, yet this needn't be the case. Concerns also can affect a substantial number of people without those people forming an identifiable group, as political scientist Roger Cobb and colleagues wrote. Here, common concerns can be identified by looking at how frequently they are raised relative to other matters.

Elevation involves surfacing these issues so they are seen by all, or at least seen by a significant portion of the public. This means that issues will be brought to the attention of people who didn't originally consider it of importance for them, or didn't even know it was an issue.

This signal has its roots in “agenda setting,” the media theory put forward by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. This theory says that the public’s rankings of the importance of various issues (the public’s “agenda”) reflects the relative amount of coverage given to an issue in the media (the media’s “agenda” – the term is *not* meant to imply that the media have an ax to grind).

Although agenda setting was conceived of at a time when the news media consisted only of print, radio and broadcast television, the theory continues to find support. For example, political communication scholar Jessica Feezell found that social media can have agenda setting effects, particularly among those who are less interested in politics. The theory also has been extended to show that not only do the media set the public’s issue agenda, they also influence which attributes of an issue the public finds important. Further, the news media can inform the mental connections that members of the public make among various issues or concepts, according to research from communication scholar Lei Guo and McCombs.

Here we’re interested in a related process, which is sometimes referred to as a form of “agenda building,” wherein scholars analyze how social actors work to elevate the importance accorded to various issues. We define “the media” broadly, to include platforms such as social media, messaging, and search engines. We ask: What role do, and should, platforms play in surfacing and elevating issues?

Related Concepts

This signal is related to the “issue attention cycle” proposed by Anthony Downs. The cy-

cle begins before a problem is recognized, continues through its recognition and the realization that it may be difficult to solve, and finally results in the decline of public interest and the eventual tabling of the issue. For this signal, we propose that platforms could increase recognition of a problem and potentially keep pressing problems on the agenda to prevent their decline from the public’s issue agenda.

The signal Elevate Shared Concerns also is related to the idea of “issue publics,” or groups of people united in their interest in a particular issue, such as healthcare or the environment. Issue publics could be a source of shared concerns that need to be elevated, in accordance with this signal. Yet there could be sources of shared concern that do not come from issue publics, for instance a problem affecting many people without any sense of a “public” around it. It is in these circumstances that the media and platforms can be especially influential in helping people recognize their shared experience.

Why It's Important

When platforms surface issues important to the public, the issues can influence the media, platform users, and policymakers. These effects can form a complex cluster of feedback loops.

Issues prominent on social media can get picked up by other, more traditional media outlets – amplifying the issues’ ability to reach more members of the public and policy makers. Of course, social media conversations can also be led by the mainstream media’s agenda, as journalism researcher Ben Sayre and colleagues point out.

Historically, the public agenda has had little influence on the media agenda – and this is what the current signal is seeking to change. It's worth considering, however, the systemic reasons why most issues have previously had little chance of making it onto the media agenda. Political scientist Amber Boydstun wrote that the media often operates on an "alarm" system, rushing to cover breaking news. Even when the news media operates on a "patrol" system, in which it acts as a watchdog looking for problems, it can still get blinkered. For example, the media may concentrate on certain neighborhoods, whose problems get over-represented.

When an issue is brought to the attention of people who didn't previously know about it or consider it important, several results are possible. One possibility is that people will be better able to discuss the issue. According to journalism researchers Michael Chan and Francis L. F. Lee, when public agendas are narrow, citizens may not find enough common ground to even be able to deliberate with others, let alone try to reach a consensus. Expanding the public agenda allows for a better understanding of how others experience the world. An example of this was the fight for women's voting rights in the U.S.; Anne Boylan writes that, "To most Americans of the early nineteenth century, 'women' and 'politics' were mutually exclusive categories." But those in the women's suffrage movement were able to push the idea of women voting first to the realm of the conceivable, then the possible, then the inevitable.

A second possibility is that people will change their minds, and start to consider the issue important. Cobb and colleagues wrote that most issues on the public agenda – that is, issues that sizable portions of the

public know about and consider worthy of action – actually start out as the concerns of small groups. Agenda building occurs when these groups turn their general grievances into specific demands, then expand the issue to new groups, often by linking it to other issues already of widespread concern. The final step in this process comes when the issue gets placed on decision-makers' agendas. A version of this process could be observed in 2014, when a few individuals linked the Ice Bucket Challenge to the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association (ALSA). Soon, millions around the globe were recording videos challenging viewers to pour buckets of ice water on themselves or donate money to ALSA, communication professor Danielle Kilgo and colleagues summarized. More than 300,000 new donors gave to the organization, and this money led to significant advancements in scientific research about ALS. The increase in donors suggests that many more people suddenly found ALS research to be important.

It's also worth noting early work by political scientist Elmer Schattschneider, who found that as a diversity of perspectives get drawn into a particular debate, the terms of the debate get disrupted. In this process, the issue tends to get redefined in more general terms, Cobb and colleagues write. This expansion is important to get the issue on policymakers' agendas, but may result in the original group losing control over the issue.

This leads us to a third arena of influence: The media agenda can influence the policy agenda, defined as lawmakers' and regulators' priority list. The press directs policy-makers' attention to certain issues and to certain aspects of issues, as Maxwell McCombs described. This implies that the

public agenda, through the media agenda, can influence policy-makers. Public policy scholar Christine Mwangi wrote about how intensive media coverage of alcohol abuse in Kenya led the government to fire several officials, arrest manufacturers of illegal low-quality alcohol, and pass legislation strengthening the regulation of alcohol production and sale.

But the relationship between the media agenda and the policy agenda is complex and influence can flow in both directions, according to political scientists Michelle Wolfe, Bryan Jones and Frank Baumgartner. In one research example, Boydston showed that policymaker priorities have a significant effect on media coverage. Her research also documented how media attention in one month can influence policy outcomes in the following month. Compared to a moderate amount of media attention, Boydston predicted, a maximum amount of media attention on a topic will double the number of executive orders and produce ten additional congressional hearings.

"News coverage can make events and their underlying policy issues the stuff of hallway conversations, lobbying leverage points, and the nation's general to-do list," Boydston wrote.

In contrast, when policymakers concentrate too much on one agenda item, this tends to exclude other agenda items. Political scientist Will Jennings and colleagues found that when "core" agenda items such as the economy, defense, international affairs and government operations gain strength on the policymakers' agenda, other issues get minimal or no attention.

In addition, research suggests that when agenda diversity is higher, this tends to

encourage policy change, Boydston wrote. More diverse policy agendas allow newcomers to the policy arena a greater chance of pushing their own issues of interest to the foreground.

How We Can Move the Needle

We think that the news media and platforms, working together, can overcome the "alarm system" limitation found in the traditional news media. By "alarm system" we mean focusing on an issue of the day and quickly moving to another issue of alarm the next day. Here, we outline some ways that that collaboration might come to life – monitoring the agendas of large issue publics, surfacing the groups' concerns and elevating those concerns to the point of public awareness.

One way journalists have undertaken this work is by simply asking readers what's on their mind, sometimes by using public engagement platforms like Hearken. But often this isn't enough, as Chicago NPR affiliate WBEZ found, when it discovered geographic disparities in reader responses. Using face-to-face encounters, community group partnerships, and social media marketing, the station began to engage with residents on the South and West Sides – predominantly Latino and African-American communities – and in the suburbs. WBEZ found that the process delivered unexpected, novel ideas, journalism professor Andrea Wenzel wrote. Some of the stories the process raised lacked a timely news "peg" and may not have been considered by editors were it not for the listener support they received.

Similarly, the engaged journalism project 100 Days in Appalachia used the conversational platform GroundSource to text-message with high school students in four states, learning about the issues important to them.

Such initiatives address the supply side of shared concerns. But arguably we must address the demand side as well. The personalization afforded by social media means we tend to see information related to issues we already view as important, or even no issues at all, depending on what we've liked and shared in the past. Boydston notes that by allowing people to choose their news, digital media sends strong signals to the news outlets we patronize – essentially, telling them we want “more of the same.” If that's the case, then we may be rewarding the news media's “alarm” mode of operation.

But we could downplay those signals, by encouraging people to choose a more varied, less alarm-heavy news diet. Or, platform companies could disrupt the algorithms that artificially intensify those signals. Right now, if someone clicks on an “alarm”-style piece, algorithms will likely show them similar pieces in the future. Platforms could intentionally diversify what they show in people's feeds, by deliberately showcasing journalism that addresses issues of concern without responding to obvious breaking news.

Another demand-driven way platforms could address this signal is with a reimagined approach to showcasing “trending” topics. Instead of just determining the most popular stories across the board, trending modules could look for stories that are popular among groups. And instead of looking for what has just popped up over the last few minutes or hours, these modules could look for what's shown staying power for weeks or even months.

The adjustment to “trending” widgets will require another significant change, however. At the moment, platforms that showcase trends can end up rewarding misinformation and conspiracy theories, because machines aren't that good yet at detecting and filtering out this information pollution. We would argue that instead of being an end product, trending metrics could instead be a signal that gets fed to editorial partners. News outlets could then respond to most issues by providing articles that the platforms can feature – either from their existing stock of stories, or with fresh reporting. At the same time, the news outlets can decline to provide content for issues if doing so would likely just perpetuate misinformation.

How to Measure

The most obvious way to measure adherence to this signal is to ask people the extent to which they feel that content and conversations on the platforms address their concerns. Surveys can also be used to ask people the extent to which they feel that platforms have exposed them to the concerns of other groups.

On a more granular level, we can use a variety of methods to assess people's issues of concern, and then compare and contrast those issues with platforms' own agendas – that is, the issues platforms surface most frequently.

One method for assessing concerns is a poll question such as “What are the issues that matter to you most?” or “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” Analysis of polling should identify issues that concern a critical threshold of people. McCombs writes that this

threshold has often been set at 10%, so as to canvas a broader range of concerns; our threshold could be comparable, but could be examined among groups as well as the overall population. Analysis should identify issues that concern a critical threshold of groups such as rural residents, various racial/ethnic minorities, women, the poor, and so on. These issue rankings could then be contrasted with the prevalence of various issues on platforms.

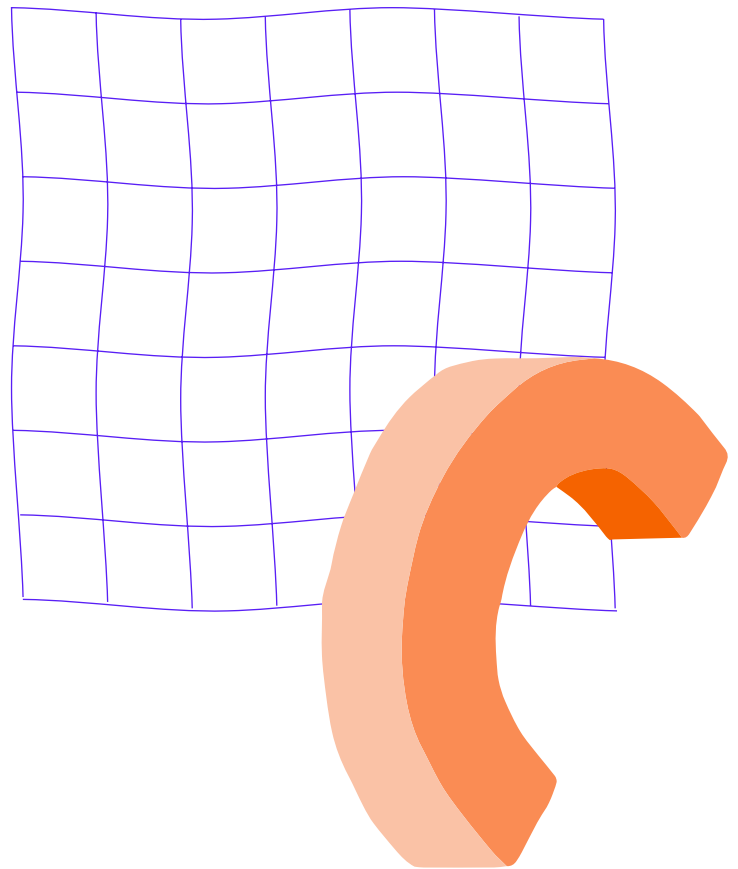
But such polling needs to be worded carefully to uncover true issues of concern. Agenda setting studies have frequently asked about the "most important problem" facing the country, and as government professor Christopher Wlezien pointed out, such phrasing may conflate two measures: one, the importance of issues; and two, the extent to which issues are problematic. Even when people are asked about "issues" rather than "problems," Wlezien and Jennings found, responses mostly reflect how problematic people find something rather than how important they find it.

A different way to get a sense of issues of concern is to use search query data. This offers pros and cons when compared to survey data, as communication researchers Michael Scharrow and Jens Vogelgesang observed. Using search query data is unobtrusive, compared to surveys. In addition, searching for an issue would seem to reflect at least a basic level of commitment or interest, thus apparently revealing a concern. But people can search out of curiosity, without truly viewing the issue as one of concern, Scharrow and Vogelgesang pointed out. Communication researchers Marcus Maurer and Thomas Holbach added that search queries reflect not just one's level of concern, but one's level of uncertainty re-

garding an issue. One may strongly believe that some issue such as climate change is important, but not spend time conducting related searches, as political scientist Joseph Ripberger observed.

Additionally, parts of the population don't have internet access, Ripberger, Scharrow and Vogelgesang noted, and these parts may be groups in particular need of issue surveillance. Finally, we note that it may be difficult or ethically questionable to attempt to correlate issues of concern with membership in societal groups.

No matter what method is used to assess issues of concern, for this to serve as a metric it must be contrasted with platforms' agendas. To do this, platforms may wish to use Shannon's H, a measure of agenda diversity derived by groundbreaking information theorist Claude Shannon from the study of entropy in physics. Boydston and colleagues found that Shannon's H and its normalized form were the best measures of agenda diversity.



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Expert Q&A



Three key questions with **Michael Chan**, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

How does this principle help create a world we'd all want to live in?

Elevating shared concerns in society is important for two reasons. First, the public will be more aware of the issues that affect not only their own lives but also fellow citizens and people around the world. They may have some or little knowledge of the issues; have a personal position on a few or many issues; or even consider some issues as not personally relevant. However, exposure to a broad range of issues is crucial because awareness is often the first step to cognitive consideration and learning about important issues, which can later lead to more informed discussion and deliberation among

fellow citizens about them, and ultimately actions to address such concerns.

Second, social media platforms can increase the salience of issues that are important but have received comparatively sporadic coverage by the media and less emphasis by policymakers at different levels of government. By bringing such concerns to the forefront and creating awareness and dialogue, social media platforms can help establish and engender public agendas of shared concerns that are subsequently validated and amplified by the media. The increased public attention can then prompt more substantive deliberation and action at the policymaking level to address the

shared concerns, and the same platforms in turn can be used to solicit citizen opinions and feedback on the issue.

If you were to envisage the perfect social media, messaging or web search platform in terms of maximizing this principle, what would it look like?

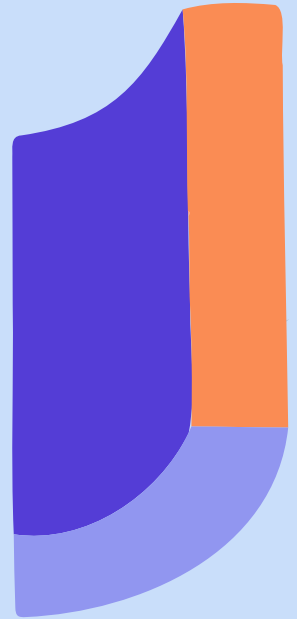
Social media and online platforms have a normative role to engender informed and engaged citizens by elevating shared concerns. However, one must acknowledge that these platforms do not exist for the purpose of disseminating broad public agendas. Nor do users necessarily use these platforms exclusively for learning about things in which they may have no initial interest. So, attempts to elevate shared concerns must strike a delicate balance between the motivations and demands of the platforms and their users. A good rather than "perfect" platform can deftly embed and integrate shared concerns into users' daily interactions with the platform. For example, on social media, trending topic-type metrics that are driven by user engagement can be supplemented with domain-based topics that raise awareness on certain issues. On web search platforms, search query results can be supplemented by issue-based results that are related to the original query. In other words, a good platform does not "force" issues into the minds of users. Issues are introduced in consideration of people's motivations for using the platform and subsequent interactions.

How would you measure a messaging, social media, or web search platform's progress against this principle?

In classic agenda setting studies researchers demonstrated the agenda setting

capabilities of the mass media by correlating their coverage of issues with what citizens considered to be the most important issues facing the country. Even though today's media environment is far more complex than it was half a century ago, the same logic and metric can be used to correlate platforms' elevation of shared concerns with the broad concerns of citizens. Traditional probability surveys of platform users can be supplemented with user analytics and engagement data to judge the effectiveness of platform efforts to increase the salience of certain issues. Moreover, in today's complex media and information ecologies it is not only the relationship between platform and user that is important and should be measured, but also the relationships and sharing behaviors between users and the dynamics in which issues are diffused. Another important consideration is the role of the media in amplifying the spread of issues and shared concerns across both platform and non-platform users. Thus, the agenda building and setting capabilities of platforms can be both direct and indirect. A precise measurement of their progress and effectiveness requires a holistic approach and consideration of multiple actors in the information diffusion chain.

Survey results



**By Jay Jennings, Taeyoung Lee,
Tamar Wilner, and Talia Stroud,
Center for Media Engagement**

We conducted a survey with participants in 20 countries to understand more deeply how the signals resonated with people globally. Please find more about the methodology [here](#).

The survey asked people to evaluate whether it was important for platforms to “provide information about issues that concern people,” and asked people to assess how well the platforms perform with respect to this signal. People were only asked about the platforms for which they are “superusers,” by which we mean people who identify the platform as their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

We analyzed how different demographic and political groups rate the importance of this signal, as well as the platforms' performance. In particular, we looked at age, gender, education, ideology, and country.

We did this analysis for five platforms: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp.¹ Only statistically significant results are shown and discussed.

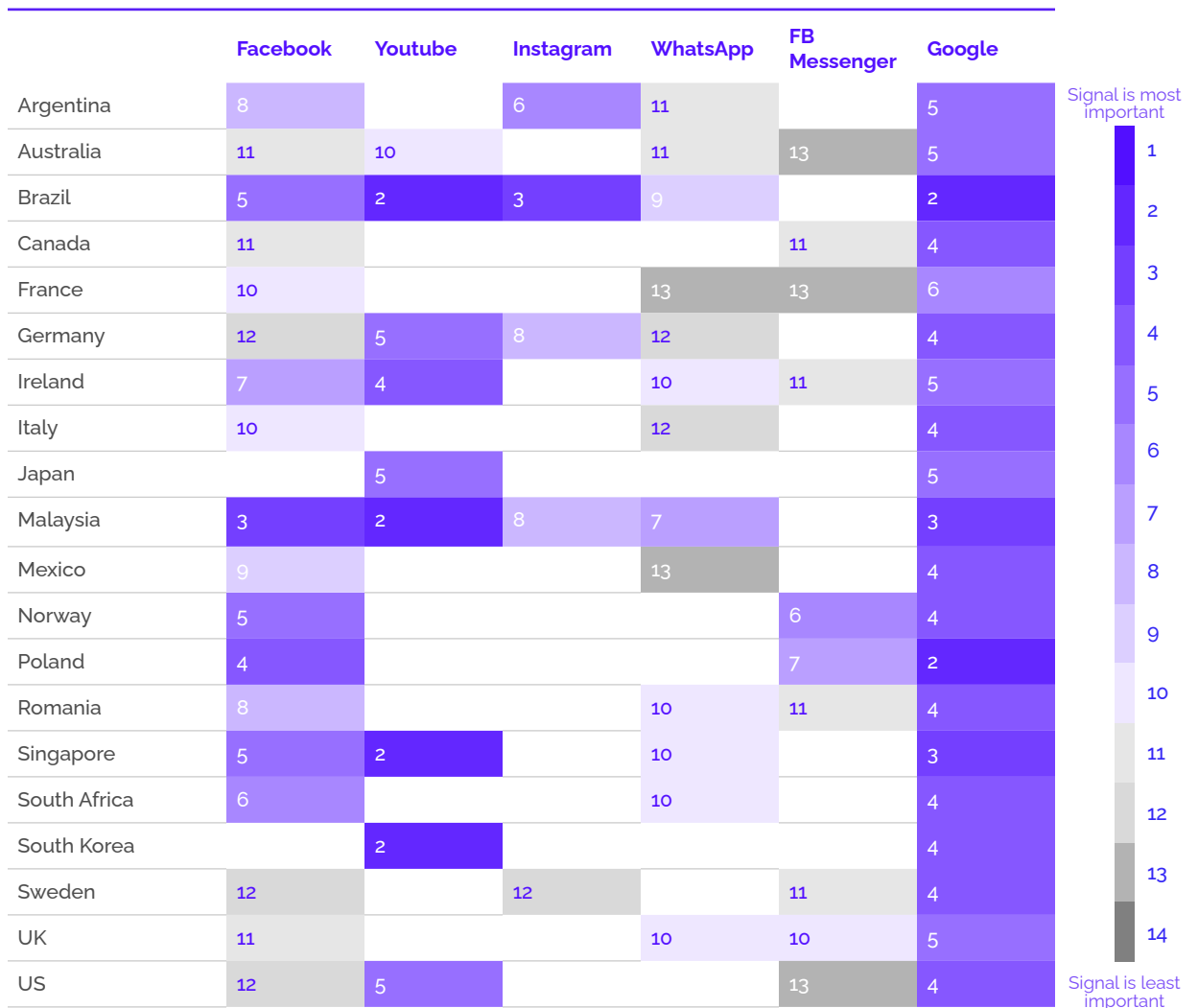
¹ The analyses include only countries where at least 200 people responded that the social/ message/ search platform was the one that they use most frequently, and then only those platforms where we had data for at least 1,000 people. For Google, this includes all 20 countries. For Facebook, this includes 18 countries and excludes Japan and South Korea. For YouTube, this includes Brazil, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. For Facebook Messenger, this includes Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, the U.K., and the United States. For WhatsApp, this includes all countries except Canada, Japan, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States. Note that the total number of respondents varies by platform: Google = 19,554; Facebook = 10,268; YouTube = 2,937; Facebook Messenger = 4,729; and WhatsApp = 10,181. The larger the sample size, the smaller the effect that we are able to detect.

Importance of the Signal

We first examined whether platform superusers thought that the signal was important. Although the signal was not rated as most important across the countries and platforms we analyzed, it ranked as the second most important signal for Google superusers in Brazil and Poland, and for YouTube superusers in Brazil, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea.

Importance ranking: Make power accessible

A ranking of "1" means that the signal was seen as the most important of the 14 signals for superusers of a given platform in a given country based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

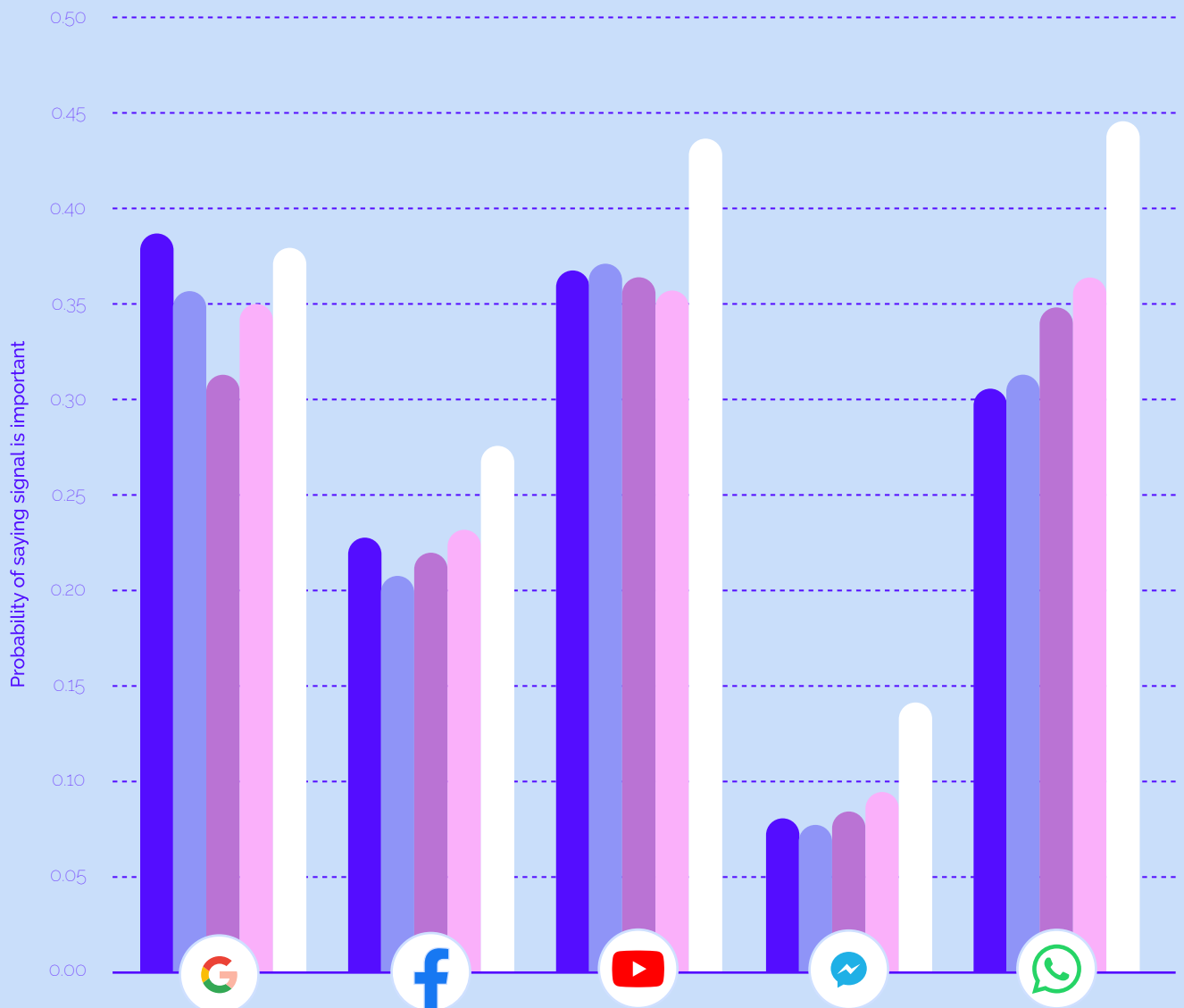


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording: Which of the following do you think it is important for [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] to do? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Importance of the Signal by Age²

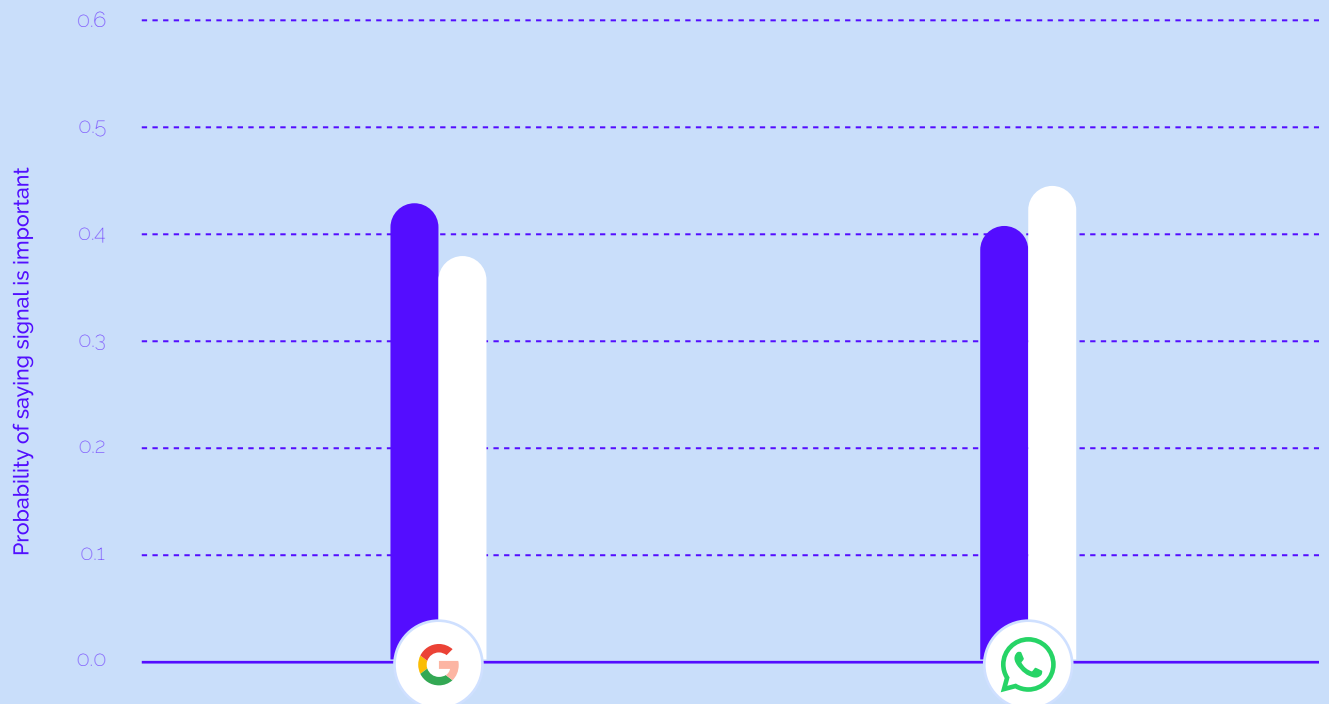
Age predicted whether superusers thought that “providing information about issues that concern people” was important for all five of the platforms we examined. Except for Google, those who were older (55+) were more likely to think that the signal was important than any other age group. For Google, those who were younger (18-24) and those who were older (55+) were more likely to think that this was important and those 35-44 were least likely to think that this was important. For WhatsApp, those 45-54 were also more likely to say that this was important compared to those in the younger age groups.

² Results shown are predicted probabilities, calculated from a logistic regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is South Africa).



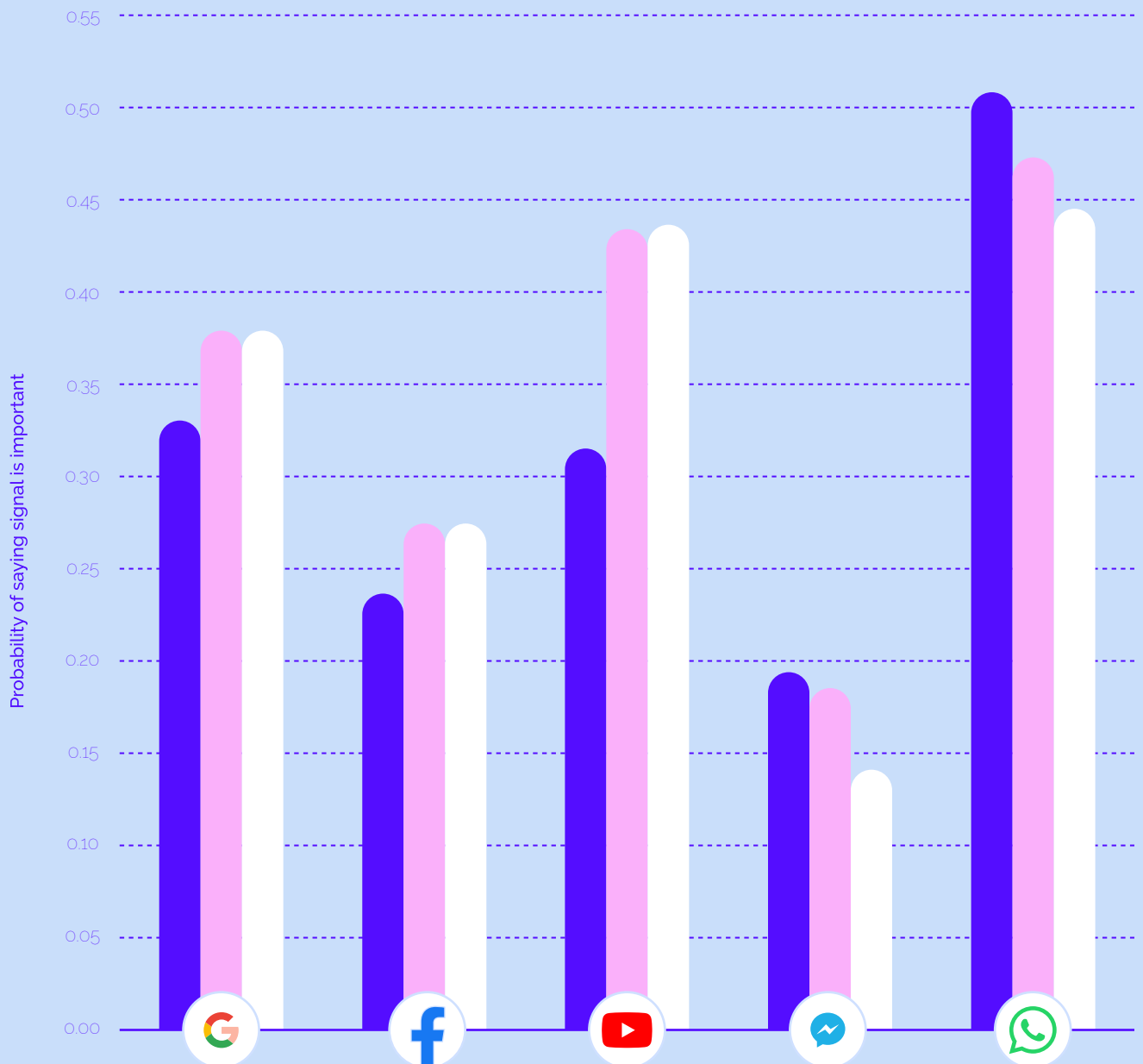
Importance of the Signal by Gender

Men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to "providing information about issues that concern people" only for two platforms: Google and WhatsApp. For Google, women were more likely than men to say that the signal was important. For WhatsApp, men were more likely than women to say that the signal was important.



Importance of the Signal by Education

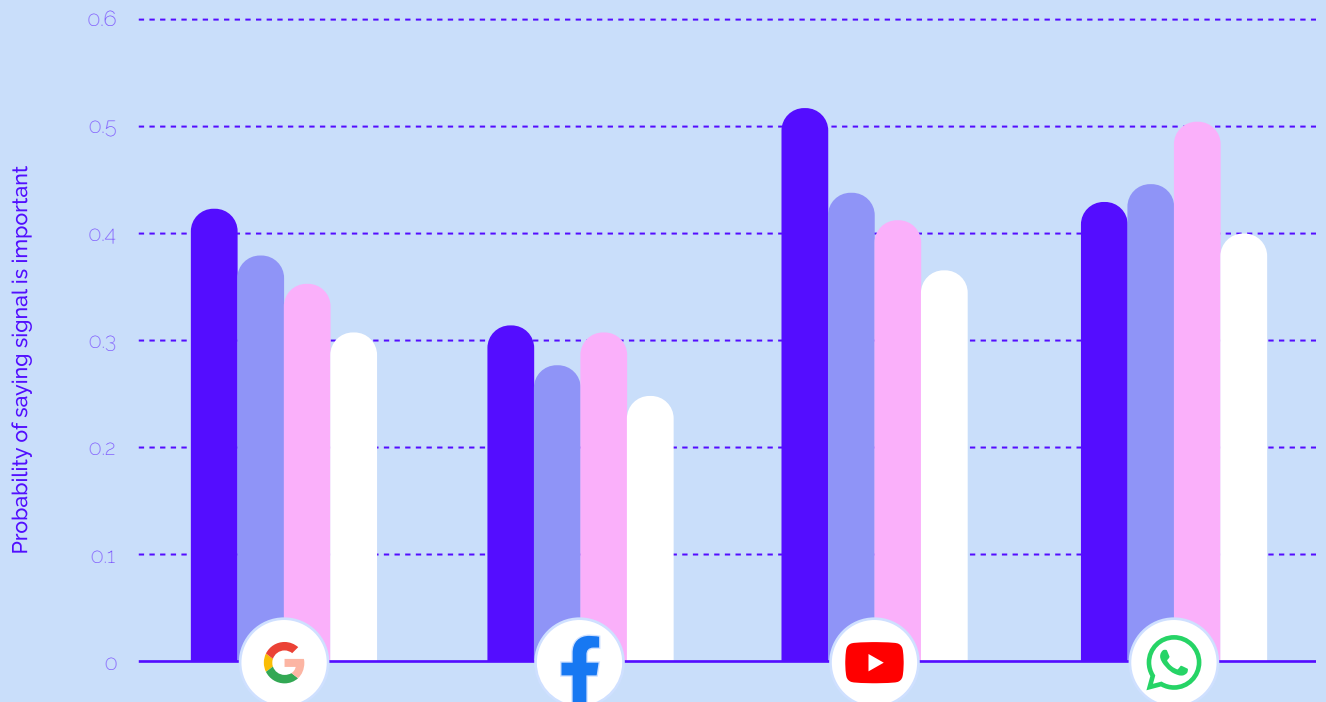
The importance of "providing information about issues that concern people" varied by education for all five platforms. For Google, Facebook, and YouTube, those with middle or high levels of education were more likely to think that the signal was important than those with lower level of education. For Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, the lower people's education levels were, the more likely they were to think that the signal was important.



Importance of the Signal by Ideology³

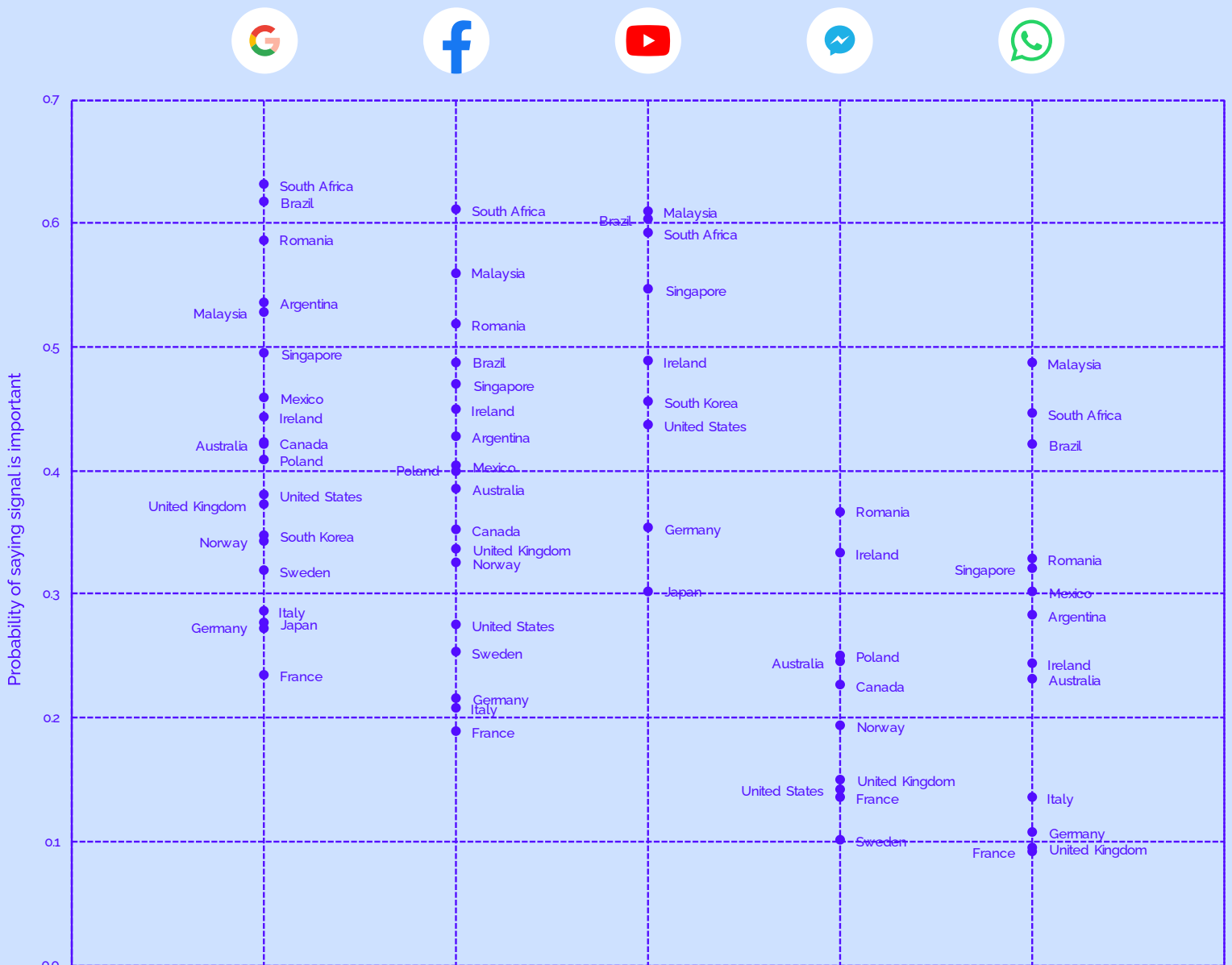
When it came to ideology, those on the political left were more likely to say that “providing information about issues that concern people” was important, compared with those on the right and those in the middle for Google, Facebook, and YouTube. For WhatsApp, those on the right were more likely to state that the signal was important compared to those on the left and in the middle.

³ Ideology was asked on a 10-point scale and people were given the option of saying “don’t know.” This was recoded into 4 categories (1 through 3, 4 through 7, 8 through 10, and “don’t know”).



Importance of the Signal by Country

There was significant variation by country for all five of the platforms we examined, based on how important superusers thought that "providing information about issues that concern people" was. The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, superusers in South Africa, Brazil, Malaysia, and Romania were more likely to endorse this signal as important across platforms. Fewer superusers endorsed the signal as important across platforms in France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Japan.



Platform Performance on the Signal

For specific platforms, superusers were first asked to say on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing well, and then on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing poorly. We then categorized people's responses as (0) believe that the platform is doing poorly, (1) believe that the platform is doing neither well nor poorly, or (2) believe that the platform is doing well. In most countries, superusers rated most platforms as doing better than neutral on this signal. The best performing platforms were Google, YouTube and Facebook.

Performance index: Elevate shared concerns

Responses of "2" indicate that everyone in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal; responses of "0" indicate that no one in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

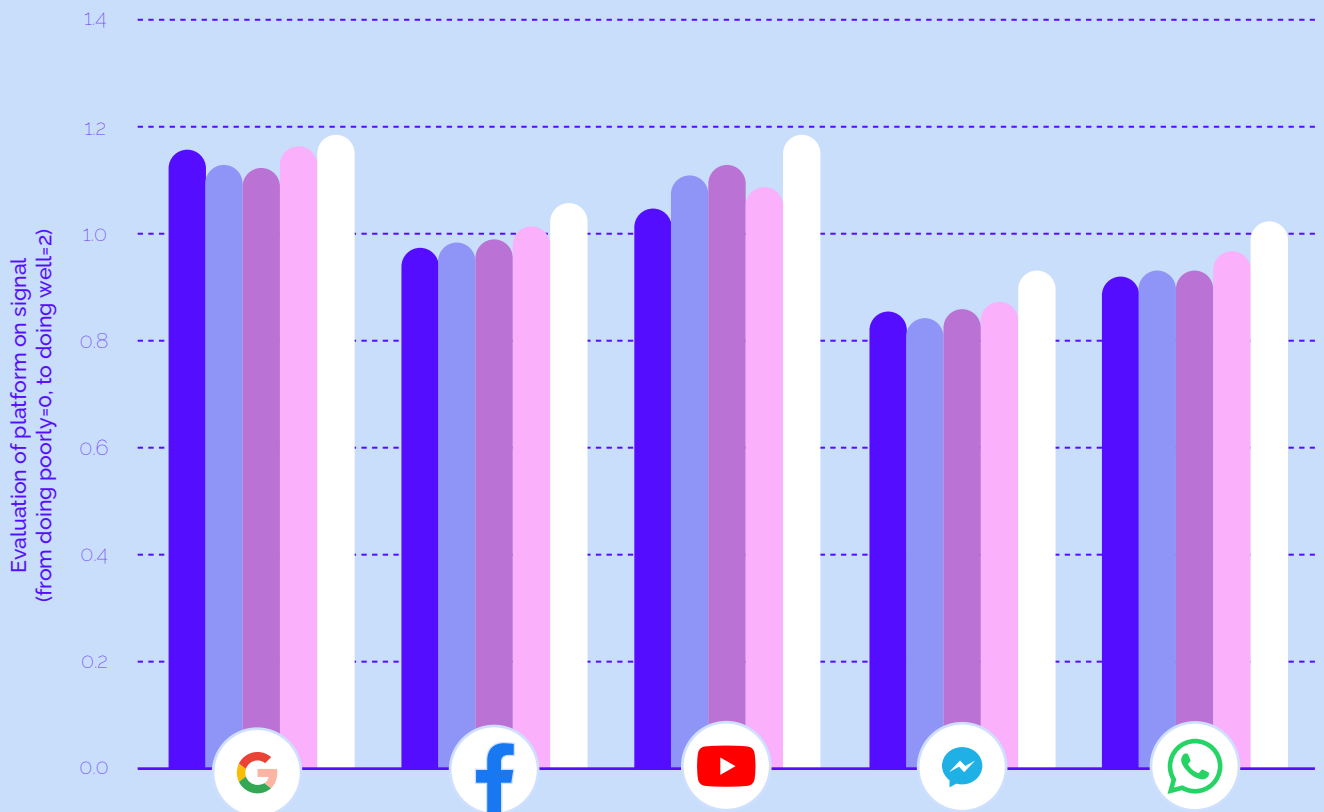


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording - Which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does well at? Please select all that apply. And which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does poorly at? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Platform Performance on the Signal by Age⁴

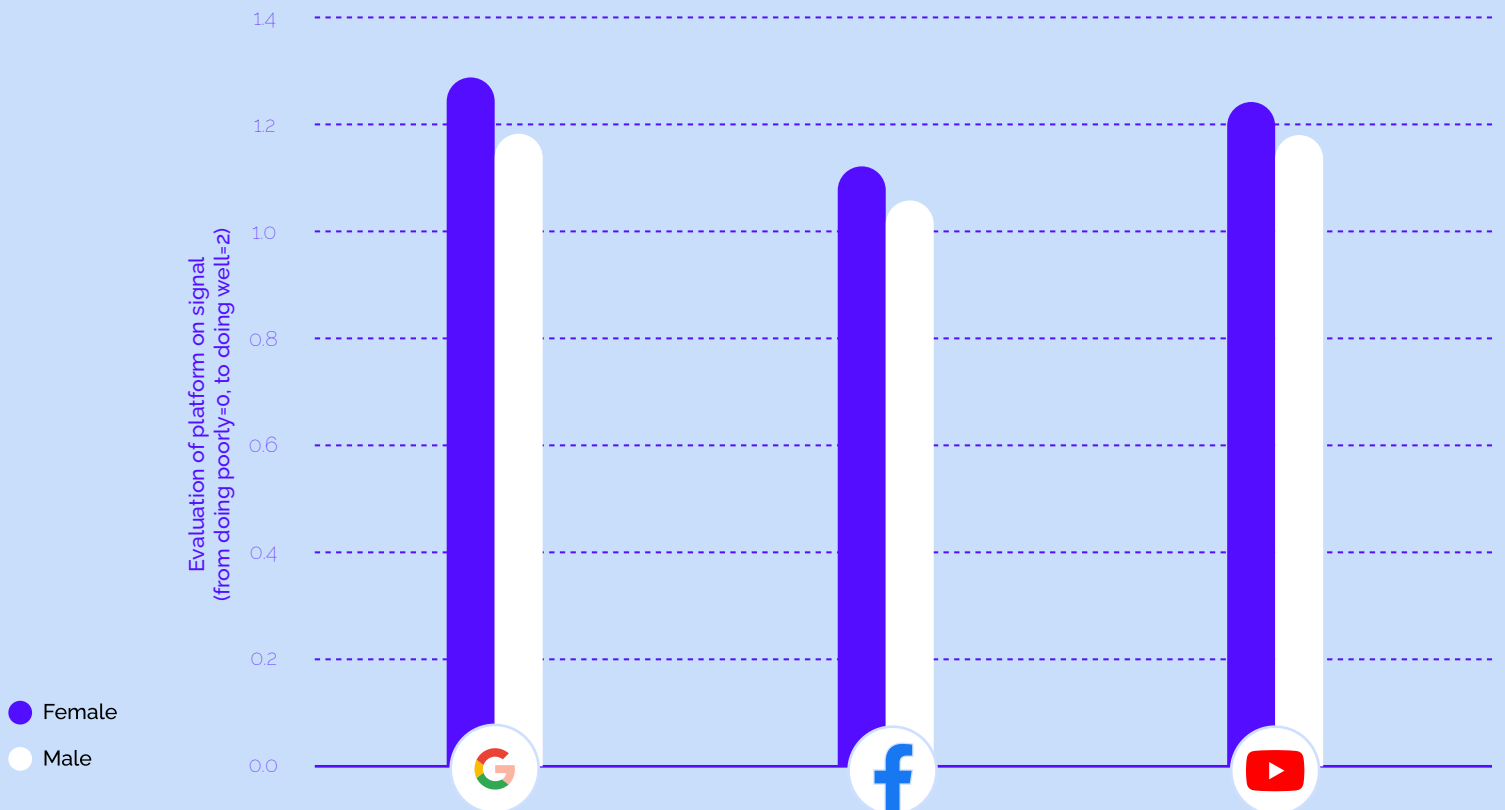
There were differences in performance ratings for all platforms on “providing information about issues that concern people.” For Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, those 55+ evaluate the platform’s performance on this signal better than those in other age groups. For Google, those 55+ rate the platform’s performance better than those 25-44, and those 18-24 rate the performance better than 35-44. For YouTube, those 55+ rate the platform’s performance as stronger than 18-34 and 45-54 year olds.

⁴ Results shown are predicted responses, calculated from a regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is Germany).



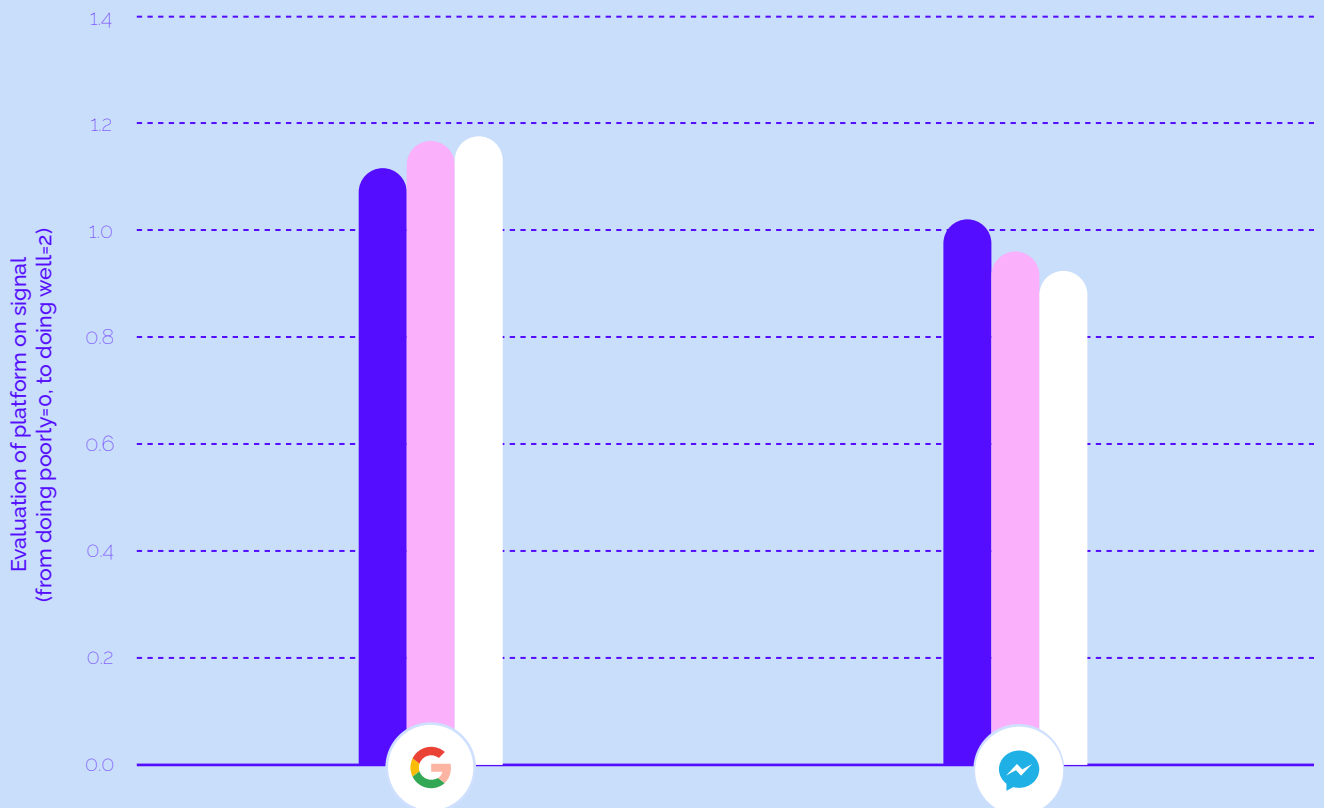
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Google, Facebook, and YouTube, women rated the platforms' performance on "providing information about issues that concern people" better than did men.



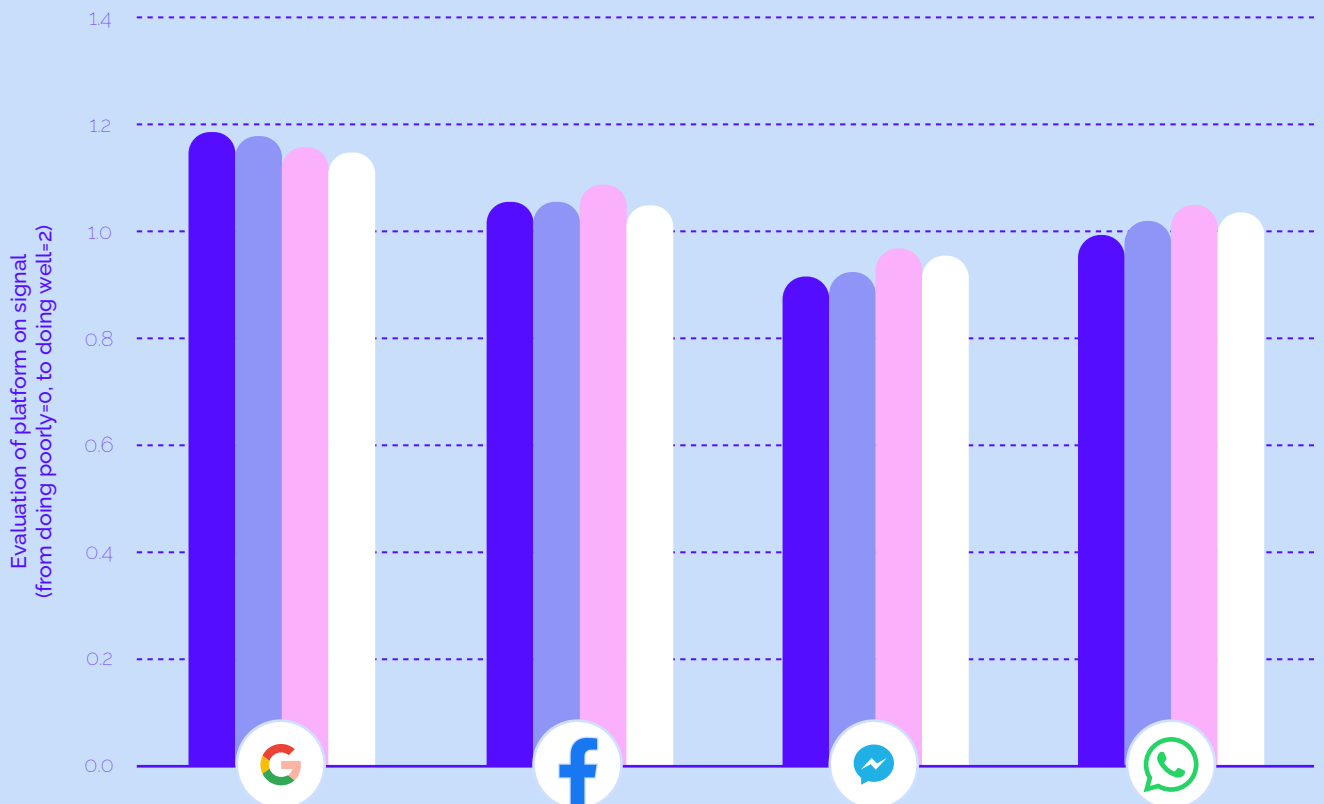
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

For two platforms, education significantly predicted what people thought about how well the platform was doing at “providing information about issues that concern people.” For Google, those with more education thought that the platform did a better job than did those with less education. For Facebook Messenger, less educated superusers rated the platform more positively than did more educated superusers.



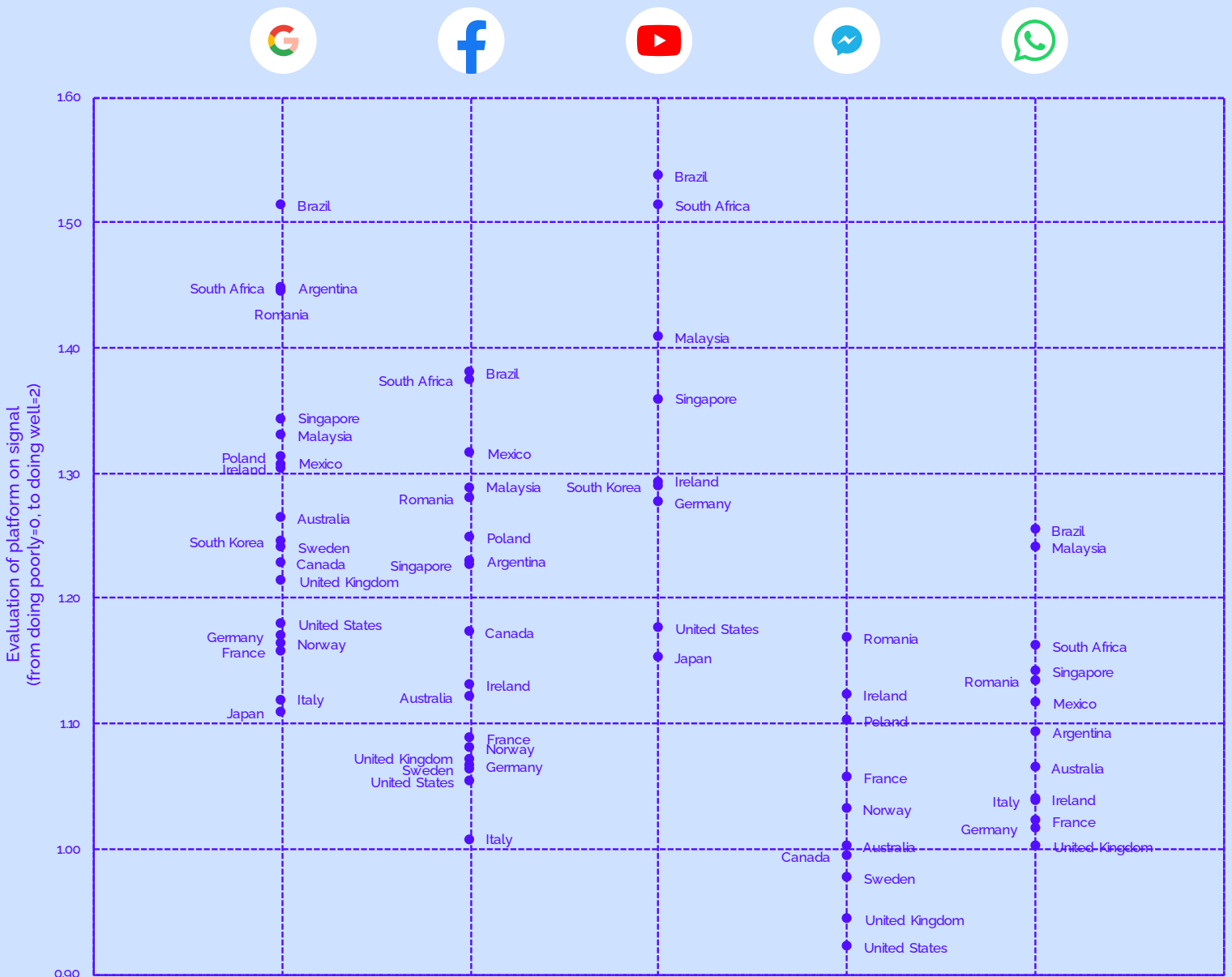
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

For Google those on the left or in the middle evaluated the platform's performance with respect to "providing information about issues that concern people" more positively than those who did not know their ideology. For Facebook those on the right evaluated the platform's performance more positively than those with other ideological leanings. For Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, those on the right evaluated the platform's performance more positively than those in the middle or on the left. Also for WhatsApp, those who didn't know their ideology evaluated the platform's performance more positively than those on the left.

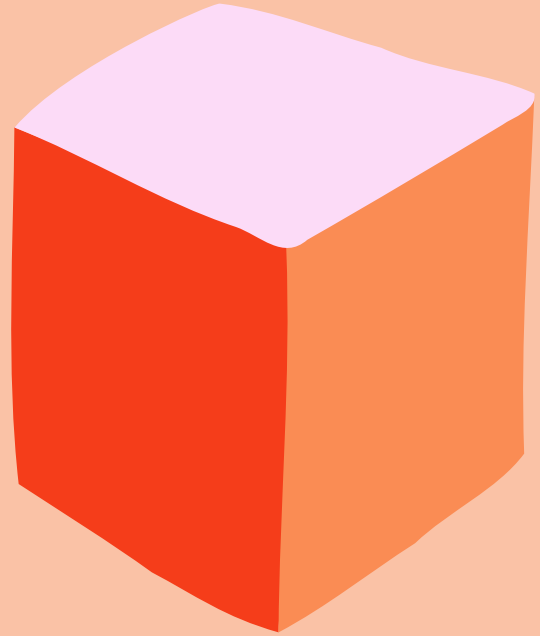


Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

There was variation by country in evaluations of platform performance. The chart below shows how superusers rated the platforms' performance in each country, controlling for age, gender, education, and ideology, from "doing poorly" (0) to "doing well" (2). In general, those in Brazil, South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and Romania tended to say that the platforms performed better with respect to this signal than those in the United States, Japan, Italy, United Kingdom, and Germany.



Focus group report



By Gina Masullo, Ori Tenenboim,
and Martin Riedl,
Center for Media Engagement

We conducted two focus groups in each of five countries (Brazil, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States). Please find more about the methodology [here](#). Participants were asked to reflect on their social media experiences and the proposed signals. With respect to this signal, participants made several observations. Please note that all names included are pseudonyms.

Participants had mixed reactions about whether social media should provide insight about shared concerns. They felt they could get valuable information and varied points of view online and, thus, learn more about certain issues. But others were not sure how a “shared concern” is determined, or they worried about an agenda being pushed onto them.



If you need information about something special, you always find a group which is knowledgeable. And then you can ask them.” – Sophie, German focus group participant

Overall, people liked the idea that social platforms gave them access to information they might not be able to get elsewhere, particularly through



I guess it's about everybody having an opinion and putting it out there, so you can see several points of view for the same topic. For instance, a truck overturned in the middle of Paulista Avenue, you can't leave, or if you live in that area, you can't go in. Being able to see the scene, 360 degrees, the same topic, the same situation – it makes everything clearer; you can see from A to Z.”
– Natalia, Brazilian focus group participant

Facebook groups. “If you need information about something special, you always find a group which is knowledgeable. And then you can ask them,” explained Sophie, of Germany.

Jia Ming, of Malaysia, noted that reading news shared on social media helps her find topics of importance to her. “Usually I scroll down, and those that I would go to... are articles shared by someone...and the news. Newspaper is on social media now. I would go to read the news and also the comment[s].”

Another benefit of social media lies in the possibility to get a more comprehensive view of issues, participants said. “I guess it’s about everybody having an opinion and putting it out there, so you can see several points of view for the same topic,” said Natalia, of Brazil. “For instance, a truck overturned in the middle of Paulista Avenue, you can’t leave, or if you live in that area, you can’t go in. Being able to see the scene, 360 degrees, the same topic, the same situation – it makes everything clearer; you can see from A to Z.”

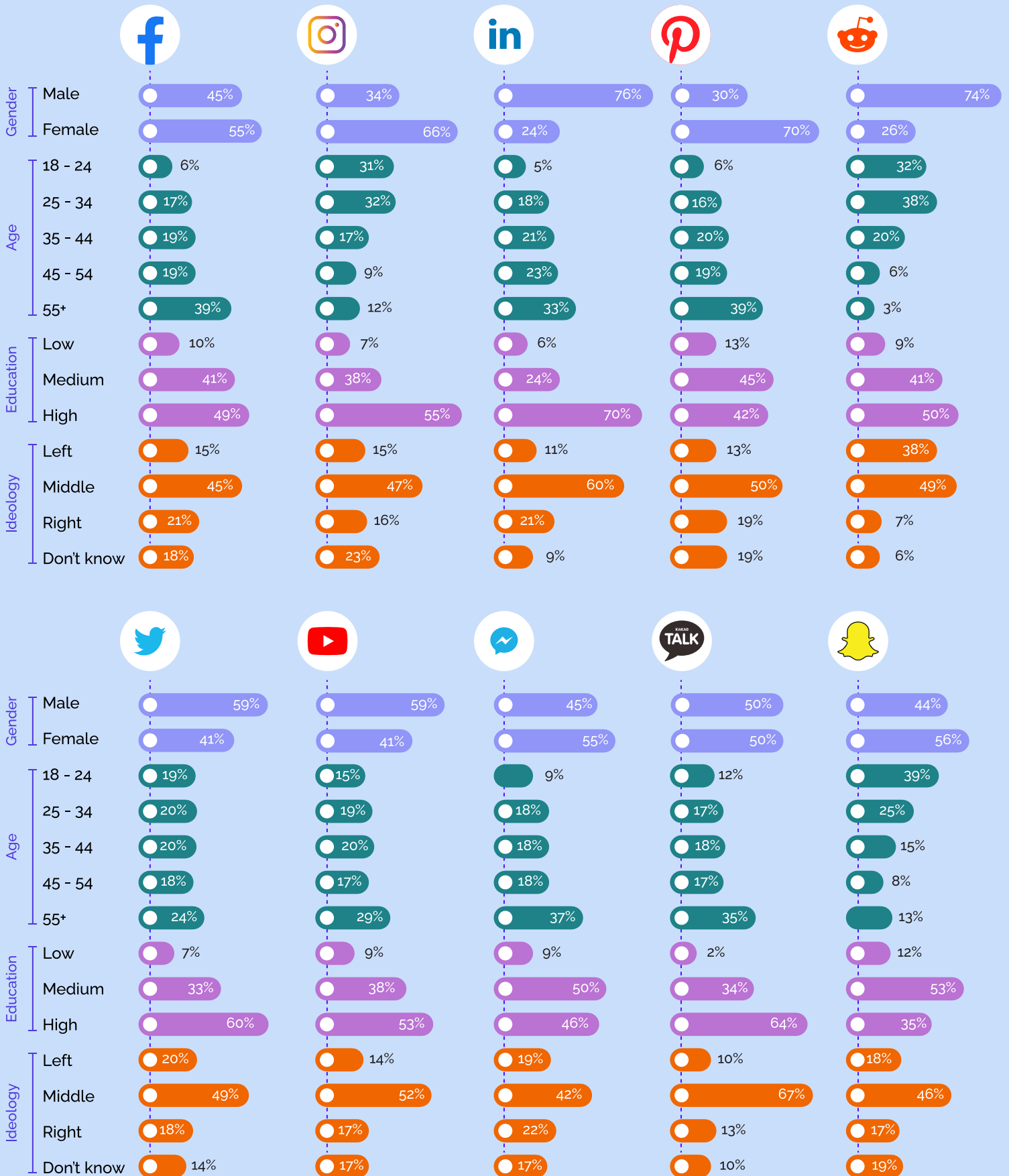
Wali, of Malaysia, shared a similar comment, noting social media can give a “comprehensive view about a certain issue... pro and con... We can see the circumstance in a full view.”

Participants noted that the idea of “shared importance” about a topic can be conveyed when platforms suggest certain posts, groups, or events to users. “Facebook makes a suggestion and tells me that there is somebody else who is interested in the same topics,” explained Clemens, of Germany. “This [i]s how I understand this. You don’t know each other from one group, but different main concerns are brought together, and you get suggestions.”

However, some participants worried that platforms could put forth an agenda when recommending certain content. “It is subjective and open to bias and open to pushing a certain agenda,” said Phumzile, of South Africa. “I can provide insight about the abortion issue and say this is what is happening only to find that is not the case. You see it a lot I suppose in politics. ... I think leave it for the people to decide and think for themselves and come up with their own insight as opposed to providing that on their behalf.”

User demographics from survey

Based on the survey respondents across all 20 countries, we looked at the demographics of superusers. For example, of those naming Facebook as their most used social media platform, 45% are male and 55% are female.





Logo glossary

Social media



Messaging



Search engines



